The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 894th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

At the outset, let me express my Government's deep gratitude to the members of the Conference for bestowing on my country the great honour of presiding over the Conference on Disarmament for the next four weeks.

I should like to express my deep appreciation to my predecessor, Mr. Tawfik of Egypt, for so ably and indefatigably guiding the work of the Conference over the last four weeks. I am sure that I can count on his support in discharging my duties and responsibilities in the weeks to come.

I should now like to make a few opening remarks as my country assumes the presidency of this Conference.

Last Thursday, thanks to the efforts of the then President, Mr. Tawfik of Egypt, and thanks to your cooperation, the Conference was able to adopt a decision on the appointment of three special coordinators, on the review of its agenda, on the expansion of its membership, and on its improved and effective functioning, respectively. Our next task in this connection is to reach an agreement as soon as possible on candidates to fill these posts. I have already started consultations on this issue and I hope that, with your support, I shall be able to present candidates to assume these responsibilities soon.

At the same time, I would continue the work of my predecessor of translating the Conference's agenda into a programme of work so that we could proceed expeditiously to our substantive work, which is - you will agree with me - long, long overdue. In order to facilitate this task, I intend to make good use of the mechanisms available to the President in accordance with the rules of procedure and with the relevant decisions of the Conference.

I would also like to encourage you to make good use of the time allotted to the Conference. If we are sincerely interested in overcoming the existing impasse in the Conference - as I am sure we are - and if we honestly want to bridge the existing divergence of views and to facilitate agreement on a programme of work - as I am sure we do - we must use the resources and mechanisms available to us immediately. In this connection, I would like to emphasize the importance of the continuation of a business-like debate. The exchange of views, a common and indispensable element of the preparatory stage of all negotiations, could be crucial in creating a necessary momentum, which would facilitate a consensus-building process. I am pleased to note that, during the first month of this session, the Conference has benefited from the lively debate and from the statements delivered by a number of high officials from member States. I would therefore like to appeal to you to continue this trend and to inscribe your names on the list of speakers for the forthcoming meetings.

(The President)

There are no speakers on my list for today. Does any delegation wish to take the floor at this stage? I see none. I should now like to invite you to take a decision on a second matter for today, on requests by two States, namely Kuwait and Yemen, to participate as observers in the work of the Conference during this session, without having them considered first in an informal plenary. These requests are contained in document CD/WP.526, which is before you.

May I take it that the Conference decides to invite Kuwait and Yemen to participate in our work in accordance with the rules of procedure?

It is so decided.

The PRESIDENT: Does any delegation wish to take the floor at this stage? I see none.

As I indicated in my opening remarks, I would like to begin immediate consultations early next week, first on the designation of the special coordinators on the three items, and then on the substantive work of Conference, in that order, but that does not mean that the issue of substantive work is of secondary importance. On the contrary, the issue is still one of great urgency and of the highest priority for us. I will carry out consultations on both at the same time, approaching various groups of the Conference, so that by our next plenary meeting we should have at least an idea of where we stand with regard to these two questions, special coordinators and the main work, the substantive task, of the Conference.

This concludes our business for today. The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 28 February 2002, at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 10.25 a.m.